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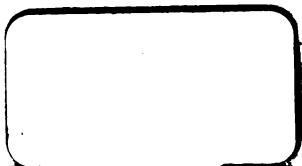
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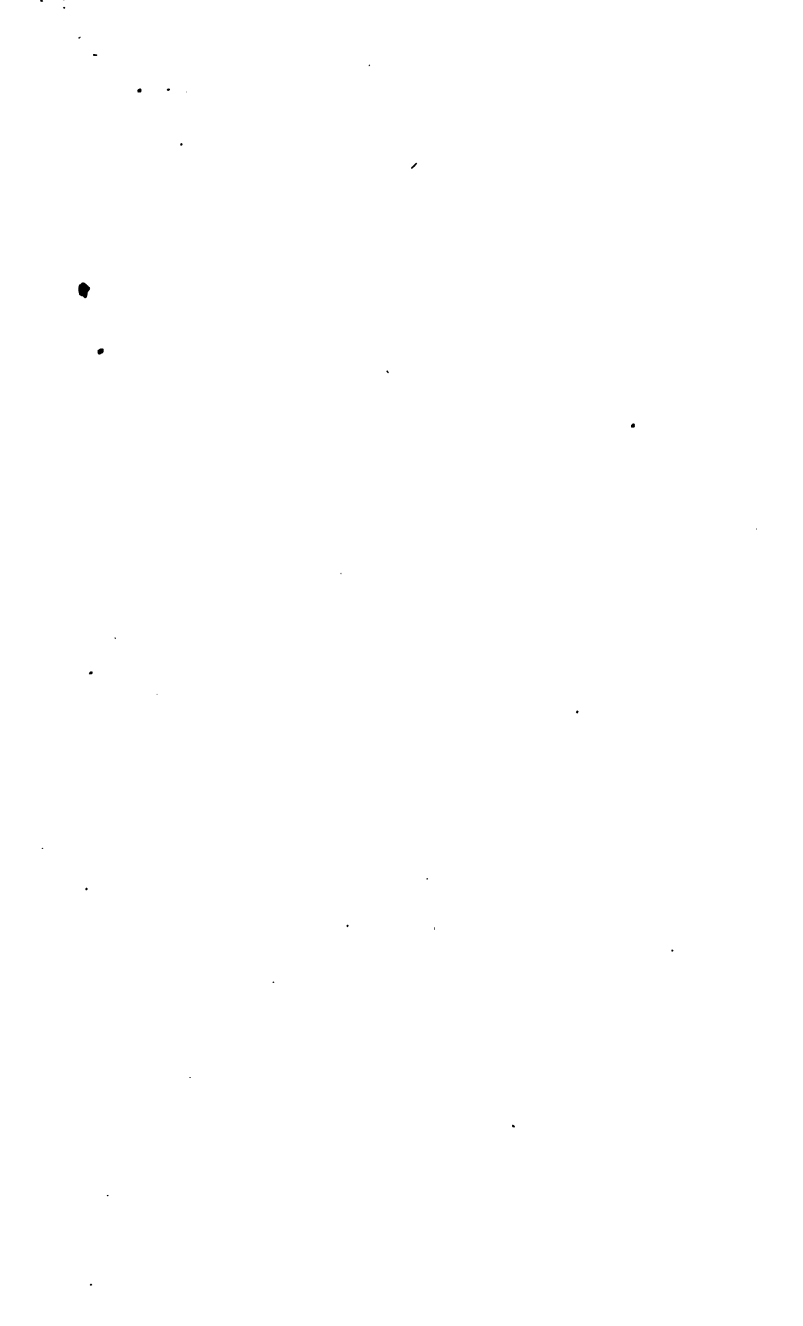


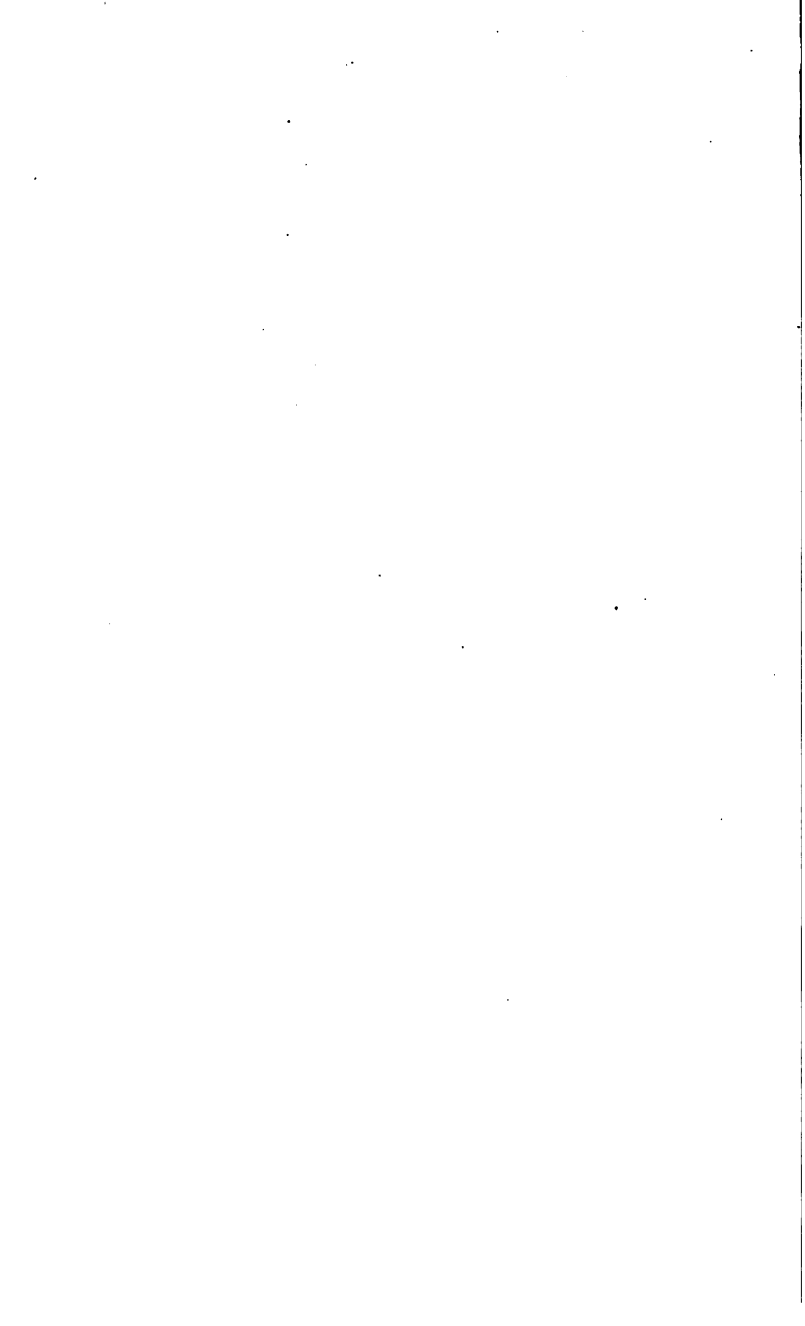
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FROM

Prof. Henry W. Longfellow,
Cambridge.







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MYSTERIOUS KISS.

A COMEDY

IN ONE ACT AND IN PROSE.

FROM THE FRENCH OF

ALBÉRIC SECOND AND JULES BLERZY.

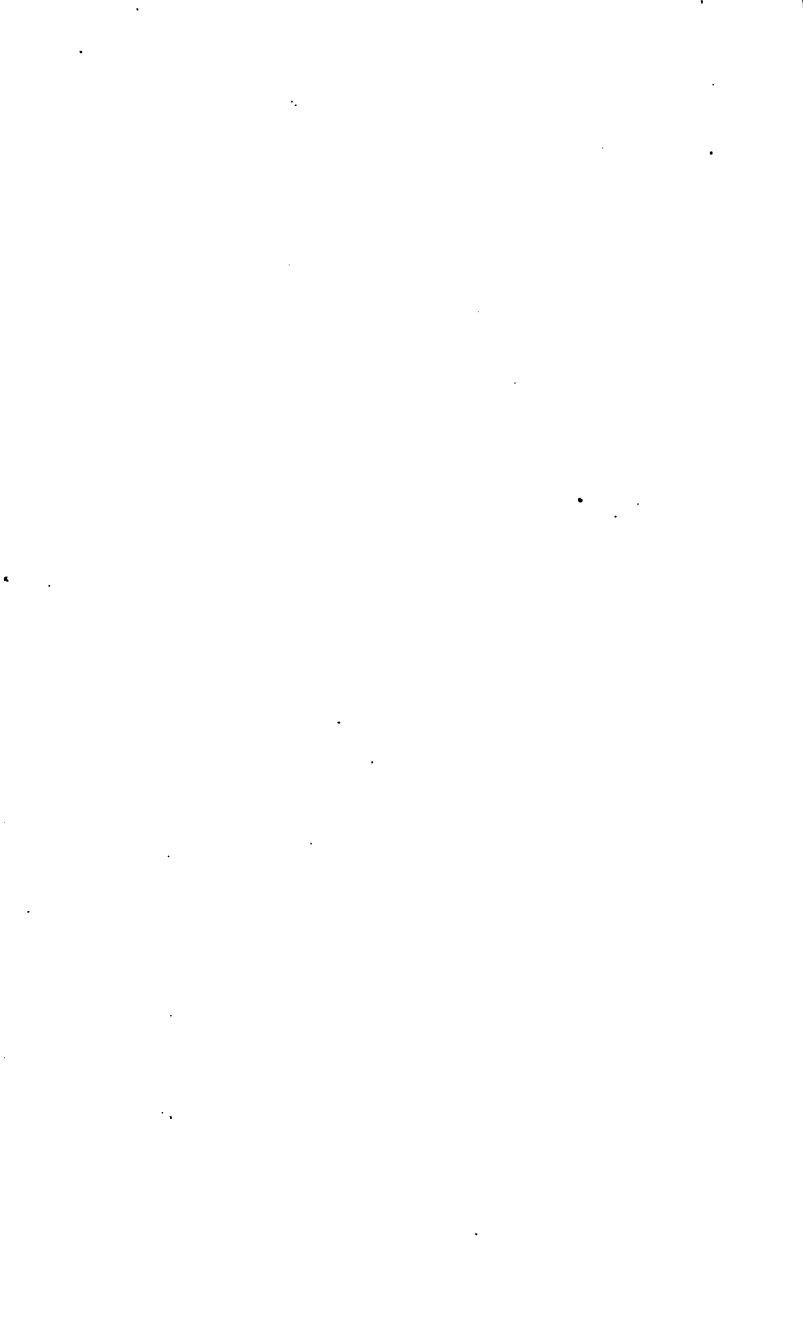
TRANSLATED FOR THE BOSTON AMATEUR
DRAMATIC CLUB.

BY N. A.

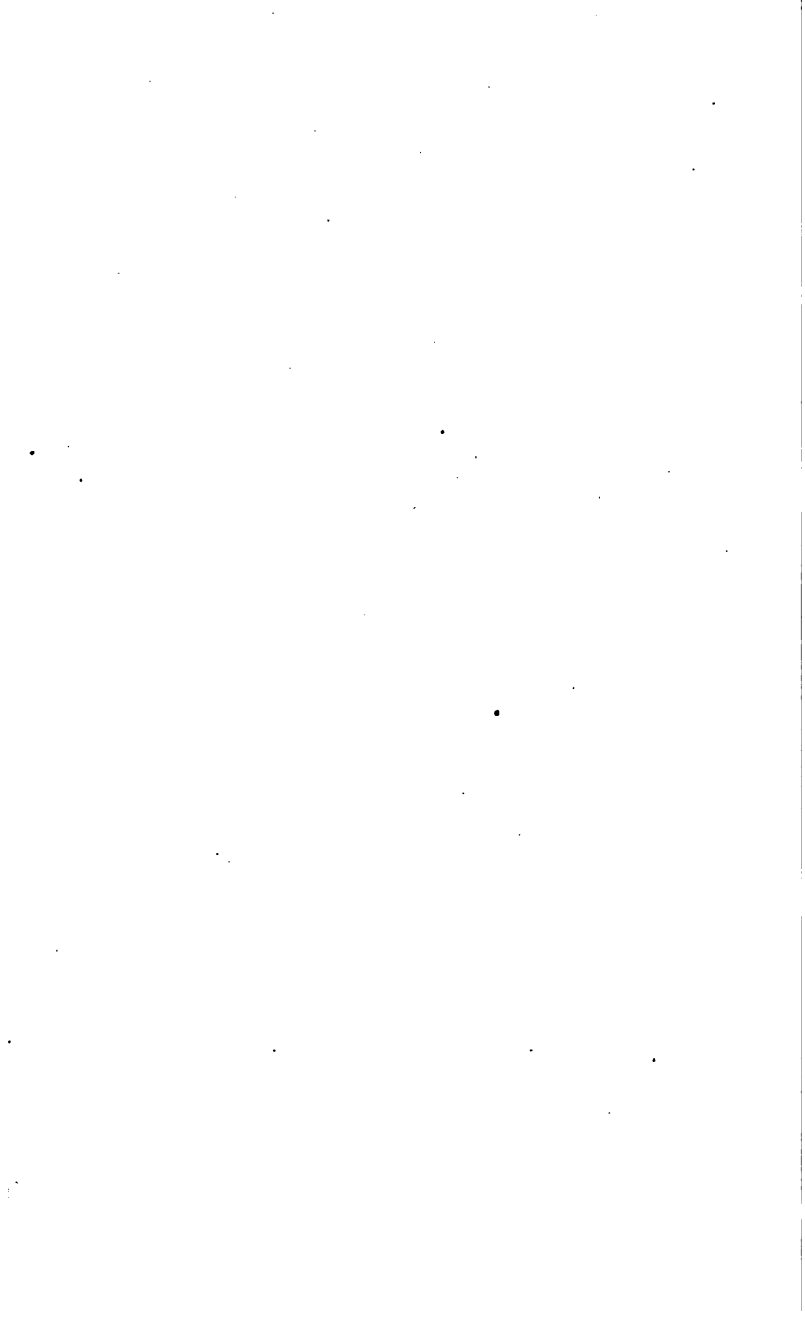


BOSTON:
FIELDS, OSGOOD, & CO.

1870.



A MYSTERIOUS KISS.



A MYSTERIOUS KISS.

A small and elegant drawing-room. Door at the back. Doors on the right and left. Fireplace in the first side on the left. Mirror and clock. Sofa on the left. Work-table on the right. Easy-chairs on each side of the work-table. Fire in the grate.

SCENE I.

GASTON, *alone.* *He ties his cravat before the mirror and looks at himself with evident satisfaction.*

What is it my good friend René de Tavenay said the other evening at the club? By Jove, he said I was getting too stout. It is only one's best friends who make disagreeable remarks. I even think the wretch added that I was rounding out here (*he touches his stomach*). O insult! My figure is developing, it is true; my chest widens, certainly; but, all conceit apart, I was never in better condition than now. My wife thinks so, naturally enough; and then, if René had hit the truth, should I have been only last night, at Madame de Barny's masked ball, the hero of the most charming adventure? . . . But what am I about to say? And why do I let out such souvenirs in the conjugal nest? It is not to be forgotten, too, that in the drawing-room of a married man the walls, however thick they may be, have ears. Happily, Lucie has not yet left her chamber. Quarter before twelve! One can be virtuous without caring to see the sun rise.

SCENE II.

GASTON, RENÉ.

A SERVANT announces

Mons. René de Tavenay. (*Retires.*)

RENÉ.

Ah! I catch you at it, you prinking before the glass!

GASTON.

I am not prinking at all. I am tying my cravat, and I confess that the assistance of a glass is necessary for this. Why does this shock you?

RENÉ.

It does not at all, I assure you. (*They shake hands.*)

GASTON.

That is all right, . . . and now how do you like it?

RENÉ.

Like it? . . . What?

GASTON.

My cravat.

RENÉ.

A poem in silk.

GASTON.

And does it become me?

RENÉ.

To perfection, but I know another which will please me more, my dear Gaston.

GASTON.

Eh! what in the world can it be?

RENÉ.

Much more simple, infinitely quieter in color.
It will be quite another kind of tie.

GASTON.

You mystify me.

RENÉ.

I speak of the white cravat that I come to beg
you to do me the favor to put around your neck
on the second of next February, at noon exactly.

GASTON.

Who? me? I bud out in a white cravat at
twelve, like my parson? I can't see it.

RENÉ.

You will have to do it though, for I ask you, in
the name of our old friendship, to be my witness.

GASTON.

You have an affair on hand? What is it?

RENÉ.

There is no duel concealed, old fellow; the sec-
ond of February is the day fixed for my wedding.

GASTON.

What, you think of marrying, you, René de
Tavenay?

RENÉ.

I am not a Knight of Malta, you know.

GASTON.

This is serious?

RENÉ.

An official announcement.

GASTON.

And you marry?

RENÉ.

Your surprise astonishes me. And you cannot even guess a little?

GASTON.

Not a little, nor at all.

RENÉ.

Very well! I marry... Come, be frank, say that you know at least the name of my intended.

GASTON.

On my word of honor, I do not know it.

RENÉ.

Let me tell you then that Madame Henriette de Chailly does me the honor to accept me as husband.

GASTON.

What do you say?

RENÉ.

Madame de Chailly.

GASTON.

The widow?

RENÉ.

If she was not a widow, how could she marry me? Bigamy is still a punishable offence.

GASTON.

Come, no dodging, let us clearly understand... You speak of Madame Henriette de Chailly, the friend of my wife.

RENÉ.

Madame de Marsac's best friend, I am sure.

GASTON.

And who lives in the Rue de Varennes ?

RENÉ.

She is the only one I am acquainted with.

GASTON.

And whose house is No. 120 ?

RENÉ.

Certainly ; but what do you mean by this cannonade of questions you are levelling at me for a quarter of an hour ?

GASTON (*to himself*).

I must be prudent. (*Aloud.*) As matters are so far advanced that even the wedding day is appointed, will you allow me just one more question ?

RENÉ.

Yes, but on the express condition that it be short and the last.

GASTON.

How then is it, my dear fellow, that last night you were not with your fiancée at Madame de Barny's ball ?

RENÉ.

For the very good reason, stupid, that she did not go there herself.

GASTON.

O, she was not there ?

RENÉ.

No.

GASTON.

You think so?

RENÉ.

I don't think it, I know it.

GASTON.

Ah! . . . and if I say that I think I recognized her in domino . . . here I can add that it was a black domino, with pink bows . . . what have you to reply?

RENÉ.

I reply that you are wasting words. I passed the evening at Madame de Chailly's house; I only left her at midnight, feeling somewhat unwell, and not at all thinking of putting on a black domino (*RENÉ leans against the fireplace*), even were it ornamented with pink bows.

GASTON.

Good, my dear René, I say no more. I must have been mistaken. I only expressed my frank opinion.

RENÉ.

It was kindness on your part.

GASTON.

And so you marry in three weeks, . . . just time enough to draw up the will of your happiness, for which you mean to dress in mourning.

RENÉ.

Why do you speak of wills and of mourning?

If I marry, it is because I seriously expect to be happy in that relation.

GASTON.

Ah yes, I forgot ; conjugal bliss ! paradise for two ! without the story of the apple and the serpent . . . O the deceitful lighthouse which leads you on and shipwrecks you, gay bachelors !

RENÉ.

I advise you to take pity on yourself, you, the happiest husband in the twenty wards !

GASTON.

My dear fellow, you are fortunate enough now to live in the twenty-first ; take my advice, don't move.

RENÉ.

Are not you the material proof that happiness is found in matrimony ?

GASTON.

Material ! material ! You have funny expressions. . . .

RENÉ.

Immaterial, if you like it better.

GASTON.

And who has told you that married life is necessary for happiness ?

RENÉ.

You yourself, often enough, even without my asking you.

GASTON.

Fine proof that ! all husbands have to say so.

RENÉ.

For what object?

GASTON.

So as not to frighten others out of it.

RENÉ.

Come, Gaston, be serious a moment, if such an effort is not beyond you. Can you deny that Madame de Chailly has every charm of mind and body? All the poor of the district will tell you that she is an angel of charity and goodness.

GASTON.

My dear boy, charity and goodness are two noble virtues, and I respectfully take off my hat to them, . . . but there is much to be said about those natures full of tenderness and devotion towards their neighbor. A young widow, accustomed to cherish and succor equally those about her, who finds herself suddenly compelled to bestow all her affection upon a great fellow like you, who are in perfect health . . . (*Aside.*) Ah! he catches the idea . . . (*Aloud*) and not at all in want of assistance, thank you, very fine, I only want to *think* of it, it makes me shiver.

RENÉ.

Decidedly, my dear De Marsac, this morning you talk at random. Admit that you have been quarrelling with your wife, and that you see life through black spectacles. Am I not right?

GASTON.

You are twice wrong. The glasses of my spec-

tacles are as rose-colored as the bows of the domino I mentioned, . . . and I have not seen my wife since yesterday evening.

RENÉ.

Madame de Marsac was not with you at the Barny's?

GASTON.

No; at the last moment she changed her mind. You know: *la dona è mobile*. She had, too, a costume that would have made a sensation. She would have appeared as the *Atlantic Cable* to the extreme.

RENÉ.

Yes or no, will you be my best man on the second of February?

GASTON.

Who tells you that you will be married? There is many a slip 'twixt cup and lip, you know.

RENÉ.

Psha! I know my De Musset by heart. I am pleased to think that you will not push your ferocity so far as to wish for my departure from this world nor that of Henriette.

GASTON (*animated*).

I desire the death of Madame de Chailly! (*Coldly*.) I wish, for your own good, that you remain a bachelor, that is all. Still, if you were to marry a young girl! . . . but a widow! Know, then, rash young man, that to oppose the whim of a widow is as dangerous as jumping head foremost from the

column in the Place Vendôme. It sometimes happens that the fall is softened by a hay-cart sent expressly by Providence, . . . but statistics show us that hay-carts pass very seldom in the Place Vendôme.

RENÉ.

Oh! I understand. Last night some woman in mask, jealous of the wit and beauty of Henriette, has spoken against her.

GASTON.

No one has spoken to me of Madame de Chailly, neither for nor against her.

RENÉ.

Well then, my dear De Marsac, I am at a loss to discover the feeling which prompts you; and as I am tired of plodding about this land, I am going to hunt up a white cravat more hospitable and more civilized. It is deliciously cold to-day. I advise you to go out; a long walk will calm your nerves. You are outrageous. Good morning, good evening, and good by. (*He goes out at the back.*)

SCENE III.

GASTON (*alone*).

O yes, be at your ease, pitch into me, rough me; it is quite natural! I am only astonished that he has not wanted to fight. So it is with the blind man to whom in kindness you cry, "Look out for yourself there," and who by way of thanks shakes his stick at you. I certainly could not make it any plainer. There are cases when a clever man will

understand half a word. And because she said to him languidly, "I've got a headache, I am unwell, leave me, that's a good fellow," he fancies, the simpleton, that she was not at the ball. She *was* there, say what you will, my poor René; and the Devil fly off with her if she thought once during the entire evening of the second of February! Am I to blame? Have I betrayed sacred friendship? No. I knew nothing of René's plans; and could I now be his groomsman? Indeed, I should not be able to restrain myself from laughter, . . . very much out of place, too, at a moment so solemn. What I say is true, there can be no doubt; it was certainly with Madame de Chailly that I was chatting for two hours in a lonely boudoir. Although she would not untie the strings of her mask, still I am sure it was she. Yes, yes, it was she, who, just as I was making my adieus, overcome by the feelings I inspired, before I knew anything of it, kissed me there (*he touches his forehead*) . . . whispering, "Gaston, I love you!" O that kiss has burnt me like red-hot iron! Then I admit my confidence was shaken; but how could I doubt it afterwards, when I heard her say to the driver of a hired carriage, "Rue de Varennes, No. 120," just where her house is, in which she lives alone . . . Well, what is to be done? Go further in my confidences to Tavenay, I have not the right. Why does he, plague take him! have secrets with an old college friend? And, moreover, why the deuce does he announce in public that I am getting immeasurably stout? Ah! my wife. (*He passes to the right.*)

SCENE IV.

GASTON, LUCIE.

LUCIE (*entering from the left*).

Good morning, dear. What! already dressed and ready to go out?

GASTON.

Yes; and it is I who have passed the night at a ball, and you who have done nothing but sleep, lazy little one.

LUCIE.

At what o'clock did you get home?

GASTON.

At five.

LUCIE.

So late! you then had a pleasant time?

GASTON.

Not at all; but, you know, one stays in the hope that fifteen pleasant minutes will make one forget the hours of boredom.

LUCIE.

And your quarter of an hour of pleasure, did you get it?

GASTON.

O no.

LUCIE.

No? . . . Was it fine, the ball?

GASTON.

A regular jam. Six hundred persons pushing and scratching each other; a geometrical paradox; more inside than it was possible to put there.

LUCIE.

Many pretty women?

GASTON.

Yes, some; but very few handsome shoulders. Handsome shoulders are passing away. Is it a sign of the times? Is it the fault of the Banting system? Well understood that the shoulders of present company are excepted.

LUCIE.

That is charmingly polite And the costumes?
(She sits down on the left side of the sofa.)

GASTON.

A wonderful take-off of the new opera-house, a very odd Suez Canal, several amusing needle-guns, . . . I was indeed sorry your Atlantic cable was not there, . . . you would have been the success of the evening.

LUCIE.

What is the matter with you, dear? . . . you can't keep still. I ask you a question, you reply, and are apparently thinking of something else.

GASTON.

Very true, I am preoccupied.

LUCIE.

Some brilliant souvenir of your ball; a mysterious domino, I bet!

GASTON.

Don't bet, my love; you 'll lose.

LUCIE.

What is it then?

GASTON.

Fancy then that Tavenay has just left me, and has made me a confidence the most unexpected, the most strange, the most . . .

LUCIE.

O, you can economize your adjectives! He is going to marry.

GASTON.

How did you guess it?

LUCIE.

I have *guessed* nothing; Henriette has told me that she is very soon to marry Monsieur de Tavenay.

GASTON.

There is no doubt of it then, poor René!

LUCIE.

Why do you pity him? Won't he have the most charming wife in the world?

GASTON (*excitedly*).

The most charming! . . . (*Coldly*.) O yes, the most charming!

LUCIE.

Is it not your opinion? You tell her so every time you see her.

GASTON.

That is no reason that I am quite sure of it.

LUCIE.

O ho, sir, then I shall know in future what to think of your compliments.

GASTON.

When they are addressed to you, dear Lucie (*he walks behind the sofa*), it is different ; then they are real, and my words and heart agree.

LUCIE.

Gaston, you are so very sweet this morning that I am sure you have some little remorse upon your conscience. I am convinced that your conduct at the ball was not quite what it should have been. Come, my lord and master, tell your wife your escapades ; your sincerity shall vouchsafe you forgiveness.

GASTON.

What are you saying about escapades ? From midnight till five I wandered like a spectre from room to room, very much impeded by my costume of a halberdier of the time of Louis XIII.

LUCIE.

Your dress was very correct and very handsome.

GASTON.

I don't say it was not, but a halberd in the hand for five mortal hours when one has not quite the habit of carrying one . . . you can imagine . . . and persons who were nothing but sylphs trod on my toes, and clumsy servants spilt punch over my back.

LUCIE (*rising*).

Poor Gaston ! And no compassionate domino took pity on your loneliness and desertion ?

GASTON.

Alas ! none.

LUCIE.

So much the worse !

GASTON.

Why do you say, So much the worse ?

LUCIE.

The state of quarantine in which you have been all the night is more disagreeable for me than for you.

GASTON.

You are joking, I think.

LUCIE.

Not at all. One likes to fancy that all other women envy you your husband, but to be compelled to discover that you are the only person who finds him agreeable . . . O, it 's humiliating !

GASTON.

That 's what it is to have the reputation of being a husband always in love with his wife. This is my character, and it lessens me eighty per cent in the opinion of those about me. In future, I shall not go into society without you.

LUCIE.

That will be so nice of you ; you will make love

to me always, and I will be so sweet, so sweet to you, that people will think we are just married.

GASTON.

O, what do you say? That would be *shocking*. Think, Lucie, that you are mother of a family.

LUCIE.

O, so little!

GASTON.

How! so little!

LUCIE.

Why, baby is only six months old.

GASTON.

Age has nothing to do with it; a baby six months old is quite enough to make you behave in a matronly way.

SCENE V.

THE SAME, A SERVANT.

THE SERVANT.

Madame de Chailly wishes to know if Madame is at home.

LUCIE.

Yes, always for her. (THE SERVANT *retires*.)

GASTON (*aside*).

I don't think I had better see her in my wife's presence. Either Henriette or I will let the cat out of the bag.

LUCIE.

You are going away, Gaston?

GASTON.

I suppose you want to talk about that great second of February, and my presence would interfere with your gushings. I'll see you again soon, my darling. (*He goes out at the left.*)

THE SERVANT (*announcing*)

Madame de Chailly.

LUCIE.

Come right in.

SCENE VI.

LUCIE, HENRIETTE (*entering from the back*).

HENRIETTE.

Tell me, Lucie, have you ever seen a person in a rage?

LUCIE.

Yes, sometimes, in my mirror.

HENRIETTE.

If you want to see a good specimen of the article, look at me.

LUCIE.

I am looking at you, and I find that anger becomes you to a charm.

HENRIETTE.

O you wretched flatterer!

LUCIE.

And am I to know the cause of your great rage?

HENRIETTE.

You, more than any one.

LUCIE.

I?

HENRIETTE.

Yes, it's all your bear of a husband.

LUCIE.

Gaston?

HENRIETTE.

I think you have no other one; where is he hiding?

LUCIE.

He is not hiding; he has gone out.

HENRIETTE.

So much the better for him; if he was in reach of my hands, I'd tear his eyes out.

LUCIE.

No, you make me tremble for him. What awful thing has he done, the wretch?

HENRIETTE.

Don't take it as a joke, I beg you; Monsieur de Marsac is unworthy of the friendship I have for him.

LUCIE (*sitting down on the sofa*).

Well, then, tell me what he has done.

HENRIETTE (*also sitting down*).

What has he done? Listen. Monsieur de Tavenay has just left me, having come, contrary to his usual habit, before two o'clock. "Henriette," he said, "is it true that you were at the ball last night? . . . Monsieur de Marsac says that he recognized you under a black domino . . ."

LUCIE.

With pink bows? . . .

HENRIETTE.

I think there was some mention of pink bows.
But what consequence?

LUCIE.

Go on, I pray.

HENRIETTE.

Don't you think in such a case a polite man
would hold his tongue?

LUCIE.

Certainly.

HENRIETTE.

Especially when he says what is not true?

LUCIE.

Gaston was mistaken.

HENRIETTE.

That is not all the mischief he has done. . . .
Your remarkable husband has made use of strong
language for the edification of rash bachelors who
propose to marry widows, . . . hay-carts, statistics,
the column of the Place Vendôme, anything you
please. René had the cleverness to shrug his
shoulders at all these kind remarks; but *I* am
offended, especially as they come from a man
whom I deemed a friend.

LUCIE.

Ah, my dear Henriette, I fear it is the wife and
not the husband who deserves your anger.

HENRIETTE.

Why so ?

LUCIE.

You were not at the ball, I know it.

HENRIETTE.

No more were you, René tells me.

LUCIE.

There is where you are mistaken. An hour after Gaston left me, when he thought I was sound asleep, carrying out a plan I have had in view for a month, I put on a domino . . .

HENRIETTE.

Black ?

LUCIE.

Black.

HENRIETTE.

With pink bows ?

LUCIE.

You are right ; it had pink bows.

HENRIETTE.

The mystery begins to clear up.

LUCIE.

A common cab left me at the Barny's door. I had scarcely entered the first room when I saw Gaston leaning on his halberd. He was gaping frightfully. I went up to him, and as he did not recognize me, I amused myself intriguing him my best. Thinking that I was not making an attack on any other person's property, I indulged in, I confess it, a deception which was hardly fair.

HENRIETTE.

A remorseless sin.

LUCIE.

He played his part with great tact and wit ; and when a look thrown on the clock told me that the hour had struck for the departure of Cinderella, while he was thanking me for showing such pity to a husband who was falsely suspected of being only in love with his wife, I could not restrain myself, and just murmuring "I love you, Gaston," full of tenderness, I gave him a kiss in which I put all my soul.

HENRIETTE (*rising*).

And your wretch of a husband thought it was I ?

LUCIE.

So it seems.

HENRIETTE.

It is enough to make me fight him ! But why me more than another ?

LUCIE (*rising*).

You shall know all, and here I have to ask your best indulgence.

HENRIETTE.

What ! there is something else then ?

LUCIE.

Yes !

HENRIETTE . .

What ?

LUCIE.

I scarcely know how to tell you . . .

HENRIETTE.

Speak, speak, you frighten me.

LUCIE.

Well, then . . .

HENRIETTE.

Well, go on.

LUCIE.

Just as I was getting into my carriage . . .

HENRIETTE.

Did he dare to get in with you?

LUCIE.

No, but seeing him, two steps from me, half concealed by a curtain in the hall, wishing to put him off the track . . .

HENRIETTE.

Gracious! You gave the driver my address?

LUCIE.

You have hit it.

HENRIETTE.

It is only irreproachable women who would thus compromise their friends! And you think I can forgive you?

LUCIE.

I hope so.

HENRIETTE.

Don't count upon it.

LUCIE.

O, I beg you, dear Henriette!

HENRIETTE.

Well, I will see, but upon one condition.

LUCIE.

I agree to it, beforehand.

HENRIETTE.

You think that this truce will include Monsieur de Marsac.

LUCIE.

I leave him entirely to you, except his eyes. Don't hurt them, for I love them.

HENRIETTE.

I am weak enough to grant you this ; indeed, he *ought* to be punished. He has sinned through his conceit, and through that too we will make him pay for it.

LUCIE.

Don't be too cruel.

HENRIETTE.

Whatever I say, don't deny it. Just think of his eyes. Is it agreed ?

LUCIE.

Yes, agreed . . . Hush ! here comes Gaston.

SCENE VII.

THE SAME, GASTON (*entering from the left*).

GASTON (*aside*).

By Jove, I 'm in for it now ; but with a little skill and prudence Lucie shall know nothing of it. (*Aloud.*) I hope I am not disturbing you, ladies.

HENRIETTE.

Quite the contrary, my dear sir, we were anxiously awaiting you. (*She sits down by the work-table.*)

GASTON.

My wife, I suppose you mean, was ?

LUCIE (*also sitting down by the work-table*).

I was certainly, but Henriette even more.

GASTON.

You, Madame ? (*Aside.*) Her restlessness will spoil it all.

HENRIETTE.

Indeed, you know that curiosity is not the smallest fault of Eve's daughters.

GASTON.

But it is Adam's sons who have circulated the report.

HENRIETTE.

I am dying to hear about the Barny's ball.

GASTON.

Indeed, about the Barny's ball ! (*Aside.*) She has cheek enough, my friend René's intended !

HENRIETTE.

I was sure your wife would tell me all, and now I learn she was not there. So then I address myself to you. Relate your adventures ; we are all attention.

GASTON (*aside*).

Her coolness staggers me. (*Aloud.*) And so, Madame, it is well understood, that of us three I am the only one who was at the ball ?

LUCIE.

As for me, my dear, I think you know that I remained at home.

GASTON.

O, you, my love, yes, I know.

HENRIETTE.

Very well, I was at my own house even more than your wife, . . . you can tell that, —

GASTON.

Because you have come here expressly to have an account of that fête at which you shone only by your absence?

HENRIETTE.

Exactly as you say.

LUCIE.

Monsieur de Marsac says that *he was very much bored!*

HENRIETTE.

As much as that? Monsieur de Marsac will pardon me if I have my doubts.

GASTON.

How so, Madame?

HENRIETTE.

Because a gay man, like yourself, married or not, ought to have in his head, if not in his heart, some dash of romance that he can apply to the present or to the future, perhaps even to the past.

GASTON.

To the past?

HENRIETTE.

The past has always a poetic charm. The Indian summer gives us often lovely days.

GASTON (*aside*).

What does she mean? To what Indian summer can she allude?

HENRIETTE.

Well, then, as you know nothing about it, or are pleased to say nothing, I will do the talking.

GASTON (*aside*).

I don't see how I can say before my wife that she kissed me. (*He takes a chair and sits opposite to HENRIETTE.*)

HENRIETTE.

It is rather odd, sir halberdier, that you have no suspicions of a certain adventure . . .

LUCIE.

An adventure? . . .

HENRIETTE.

Which in two days will be the amusement of "all Paris"; you know the great "all Paris."

LUCIE.

Don't keep us in suspense, Henriette. I am wild to know the joke before "all Paris."

GASTON.

As you stayed at home, who has told you so soon and so correctly, Madame?

HENRIETTE.

My aunt Hermangilde, mistress of the Château of Beaubuis, who was present at the fête in spite of her fifty years.

GASTON.

Yes, fifty years ten years ago, at least.

HENRIETTE.

Be respectful to the lady, Monsieur de Marsac. My aunt has always had a great deal of affection for you.

GASTON.

I am grateful, as is due, Madame. I am only surprised that at her age . . .

HENRIETTE.

She is fond of society ; she has still an elegant figure ; she is daintily gloved and booted always. I assure you that under a mask and domino she can still charm.

GASTON (*aside*).

Yes, a blind person.

HENRIETTE.

Meeting a fine-looking cavalier, at whose birth she happened to be present, it seems that she has made a conquest through her wit, which is always ready, . . . such a conquest that she kept him by her the entire evening.

GASTON.

He ought to be considered the happiest of mortals !

HENRIETTE.

Not so very wretched, as you will see. Charmed at finding so much amiability in this great fellow, whom she remembered to have often dandled on her knees, my excellent aunt, in bidding him good night, was seized with an irresistible *désire* . . .

GASTON.

Of leaving him something in her will ?

HENRIETTE.

Of kissing him.

GASTON.

Great Heavens! and did the mistress of the Château of Beaubuis satisfy this naughty desire?

HENRIETTE.

Completely.

GASTON (*aside*).

It seems there was a good deal of kissing last evening. (*Aloud.*) Is there any news of the victim?

HENRIETTE.

In the mean time my aunt tells me that her kiss seemed very agreeable to the recipient.

GASTON.

He is a hero! I think he should receive a decoration.

HENRIETTE.

Yes, it is the first one, the beginning of a series. I hope he will have some more. Madame de Beaubuis only got home at five, and this morning she told me her little romance, . . . the romance of an old lady from the country. We laughed till we cried, breakfasting at my house.

GASTON.

How so, breakfasting at her apartment?

HENRIETTE.

No, with me.

GASTON.

Madame de Beaubuis is staying with you?

HENRIETTE.

She always does when she comes to Paris.

GASTON.

Gracious! and you say she was at the ball?

HENRIETTE.

Yes, and I repeat it, and she was intensely amused.

GASTON.

Without you?

HENRIETTE.

Don't you think her position, and her fifty summers, which were over at least ten years ago, make it proper for her to go into society alone and without a chaperon?

GASTON.

And the name of the mystified one, has she mentioned it?

HENRIETTE.

No, but she will, and you may be sure that I shall make no secret of it.

GASTON (*aside and rising*).

It was old Madame Hermangilde. If she lets it out, I shall have to hide my diminished head.

HENRIETTE (*rising*).

Dear Lucie, I must go and try on my wedding dress; will you come with me?

LUCIE (*rising*).

Most willingly.

HENRIETTE.

Good by, Monsieur de Marsac. I will bring your wife back in fifteen minutes. Will see you again soon.

GASTON (*mournfully*).

O, I hope so, I hope so, Madame.

LUCIE (*aside to HENRIETTE*).

He is quite pale.

HENRIETTE (*aside to LUCIE*).

It is not dangerous, it is my aunt's kiss.

LUCIE (*aside*).

Console yourself with this, poor fellow. (*She sends a kiss to GASTON, who is deep in thought. The two ladies go out at the back.*)

SCENE VIII.

GASTON (*alone*).

The professors of history are right. The Tarpeian rock is two steps from the capitol. An old mistress of a country château! And Gaston de Marsac has been the Joseph of this new version of Potiphar. There is no use in keeping up the illusion. I have been twisted about her finger, like students in their first year, who at the opera balls give bonbons and flowers to the first girls they meet. . . . Madame de Chailly insulted! Tavenay displeased! and my wife, who can know the whole story any moment. . . . O, I've had a fine campaign of it! If I could only give her back her wretched kiss; Madame de Beaubuis must not say

a word. I'll go first to 120 Rue de Varennes, then to the club, where René is probably just sitting down to a game of whist, full of revokes and gloom. What! you back, old fellow?

SCENE IX.

GASTON, RENÉ (*who enters from the back.*)

RENÉ.

Considering how I left you this morning I imagine that you did not expect me back so soon. (*He sits down by the work-table.*) Your wife and Madame de Chailly, whom I have just met, asked me to wait for them here. I won't conceal from you that I deluded myself with the pleasant hope of not finding you.

GASTON.

What unkindness! You are still angry with me?

RENÉ.

Indeed I am. You have wounded my most delicate feelings.

GASTON.

Come, come, it was only a joke that meant nothing.

RENÉ.

That meant nothing? It has just succeeded in making me the most wretched of men.

GASTON.

Well, then, I say unhesitatingly that I was wrong. When you came in I was just on the point of going, I tell you frankly, . . . of going to make my ex-

cuses to you. Are you satisfied? Is this declaration enough? Or do you insist that it appear in the *Moniteur*?

RENÉ.

Can I believe my ears?

GASTON.

If you don't believe your own, whose ears will you?

RENÉ.

And it is *you* who tell me this?

GASTON.

I myself; I have entirely changed my opinion.

RENÉ.

And so you agree that I am right in loving Madame de Chailly?

GASTON.

Yes.

RENÉ.

And in marrying her, though she is a widow?

GASTON.

Yes.

RENÉ.

And you will be my groomsmen on the second of February?

GASTON.

Yes.

RENÉ (*rising*).

And you will put on a white cravat?

GASTON.

At exactly twelve, yes, a hundred times yes. You could nowhere better bestow your affection.

RENÉ.

But this morning . . .

GASTON.

O, this morning I was full of the recollection of my evening at the ball. All the false joy, false affection, heartless smiles, the masks, emblems of the false and deceitful, had made my feelings bitter, and my heart sceptical. If I had had to be married the day after a mask ball, I make a big bet that I should still be a bachelor.

RENÉ (*shaking him by the hand*).

If you knew what pleasure it gives me to hear you talk thus.

GASTON.

And now excuse me, I must be off.

RENÉ.

Where are you going?

GASTON.

A necessary visit, . . . two steps from here. I shall be back before Madame de Chailly, of whom I must ask pardon.

RENÉ.

Why don't you wait for her?

GASTON.

I tell you again, it is a visit I cannot put off, . . . close by here . . .

RENÉ.

You are so hurried then?

GASTON.

Extremely hurried.

RENÉ.

You make me anxious. Can't you tell me?

GASTON.

Not a word.

RENÉ.

Do you wish me to go with you?

GASTON.

I wish you to detain me no longer. It is necessary that I see without delay the person with whom I have business.

RENÉ.

Go, then.

GASTON (*pretending to go*).

I say, René, . . . do you think there are any women able to keep a secret?

RENÉ.

They mention some.

GASTON.

Yes, so much the better! (*He goes out at the right.*)

RENÉ.

Not many, but they mention some few.

SCENE X.

RENÉ (*alone*).

Where in the world is he running to now? Who is this mysterious person whose silence is so important? What reason is there for his sudden

change? Don't marry, you will do well; marry, you will do still better. Something is running in his brain; could he have been speculating at the Bourse? That is evident. Ah Heavens! would he deceive his wife? So it seems.

SCENE XI.

RENÉ, HENRIETTE, LUCIE.

LUCIE.

You are alone, Monsieur de Tavenay?

RENÉ.

Alone. . . . (*He kisses HENRIETTE'S hand.*)

LUCIE.

Where is my husband?

RENÉ.

Gaston has just gone out, Madame.

LUCIE.

Where has he gone?

RENÉ.

I asked him, and he would not tell me.

HENRIETTE.

I thought Orestes concealed nothing from Pylades.

RENÉ.

Orestes has become a concealer.

LUCIE.

How did Gaston seem on leaving you?

RENÉ.

He appeared to have something on his mind, to be ill at ease.

HENRIETTE.

But Monsieur de Marsac could not surely have disappeared down a trap door, with slow music from the orchestra, like the devils in a fairy play? He must have told you something to put you on his track?

RENÉ.

You are right, my dear Henriette; but I doubt if I ought to explain before Madame de Marsac.

LUCIE.

It is serious, then?

RENÉ.

It would be serious from the mouth of a husband who did not love his wife, . . . but from Gaston, who every one knows, Madame, is still more in love with you than the first day . . .

HENRIETTE.

René, please finish your panegyrics. This is a badly chosen moment to sing the praises of Monsieur de Marsac.

LUCIE.

What did he say?

RENÉ.

Why I understood that some person . . .

HENRIETTE.

Some lady? . . .

RENÉ.

Just so . . . is in possession of an important secret which concerns him.

HENRIETTE.

And Monsieur de Marsac appeared to take a lively interest that this secret should not be known by every one?

RENÉ.

A tremendous interest.

HENRIETTE.

It is as clear as sunlight. (*To LUCIE.*) Your husband is at this very moment at my house insisting upon seeing my aunt.

RENÉ.

Madame de Beaubuis?

HENRIETTE.

Exactly.

RENÉ.

But she is not in Paris, as far as I know.

HENRIETTE.

No, she is not, . . . she is at Nice. He knows it by this time, and here I am compelled to waive my revenge.

RENÉ.

What revenge?

HENRIETTE.

O yes, you are entirely in the dark. You know, however, about the column Vendôme, hay-carts, danger in marrying widows, no white cravats . . .

RENÉ.

But Gaston refuses no longer, quite the contrary.

HENRIETTE.

Yes, he agrees because I told him that it was with my aunt he flirted at the Barny's, . . . but when he discovers that she has not left Nice, he will begin again to think that it was I who flung myself on his neck, and then . . .

RENÉ.

What! A lady has thrown herself into Gaston's arms? and he has dared . . .

LUCIE.

Don't get excited, Monsieur de Tavenay, that lady was his own wife.

RENÉ.

You, Madame?

LUCIE.

I myself in person.

RENÉ.

And he did not recognize you?

LUCIE.

He had that rudeness.

HENRIETTE.

The rudeness he has shown me is serious in another way, and I think that the punishment is not enough for the offence.

LUCIE.

You insist still.

HENRIETTE.

I have less pity for him than you, my dear, and you will allow me to make him feel once more the end of my nails.

LUCIE.

Always understood that you will spare his eyes.

HENRIETTE.

Yes, you love them, it is well known.

RENÉ.

What do you mean to do, Henriette?

HENRIETTE.

I don't know, but the time, the place, and the way matters stand will inspire me.

RENÉ.

Hush! I hear Gaston . . .

HENRIETTE.

Listen in the next room. 'T is an old trick, but it always succeeds. You are both too clever not to know just what you must say, and exactly at what moment you ought to return here. Go and prepare your parts. (*LUCIE and RENÉ go out on the left.*)

SCENE XII.

HENRIETTE, then GASTON (*entering from the back*).

HENRIETTE.

Now then we are alone, Monsieur de Marsac.
. . . (*She sits down by the work-table and takes a newspaper.*)

GASTON (*seeing HENRIETTE*).

Ah! (*he shuts the door*) yes, quite alone, Madame de Chailly. (*He sits near the work-table opposite HENRIETTE.*)

HENRIETTE.

O, it is you, sir. I did not hear you come in. You are lighter than the air.

GASTON.

Do you know where I come from?

HENRIETTE.

How should I know?

GASTON.

Seek and you will find.

HENRIETTE.

You speak like the Gospel. You come from Tattersall's.

GASTON.

Considering how far Tattersall's is from the Rue Saint-Dominique, I should be unable to have the pleasure of being so near you. Guess again.

HENRIETTE.

You come from your lawyer's?

GASTON.

His office is closed Sundays and fête days. Guess once more.

HENRIETTE.

From your tailor?

GASTON.

I am not in the habit of going to him. He comes to me.

HENRIETTE.

I give it up.

GASTON.

So soon? Very well, I come from your house, Madame.

HENRIETTE.

I bet you did not find me at home.

GASTON.

I did not even ask for you.

HENRIETTE.

That was not very polite.

GASTON.

Informed by you of the arrival of your aunt, who has always had a great affection for me, I hastened to pay her my respects.

HENRIETTE.

It is some time since you have seen Madame de Beaubuis?

GASTON.

A great while.

HENRIETTE.

Did she seem changed to you?

GASTON.

A truce to jesting, Madame; your aunt is at Nice, where she is taking care of her old rheumatics.

HENRIETTE.

You greatly astonish me, Monsieur de Marsac.

GASTON.

So if she is at Nice, she is not at Paris.

HENRIETTE.

If logic was banished from human reasoning, it would find a last asylum with you.

GASTON.

Then if she is not at Paris, she was not at the ball.

HENRIETTE.

Better and better.

GASTON.

And if she was not at the ball, she has kissed no one.

HENRIETTE.

How do you prove that?

GASTON.

¶ We are alone. The presence of Lucie does not oblige us to burden our consciences with a big falsehood. . . .

HENRIETTE.

What big falsehood?

GASTON.

Say that it was you who fascinated me under the mask. . . .

HENRIETTE.

Then it must have been I who kissed your forehead? I, who said "I love you, Gaston"? In truth, Monsieur de Marsac, you are a model of impertinence. (*She rises.*)

GASTON (*rising and trying to take her hand*).

Will you refuse me this little hand that you gave me last night so confidently?

HENRIETTE (*gayly*).

Stop, . . . or I 'll call your wife.

GASTON.

Since when is it that incendiaries ring the bells and wake up the firemen ?

HENRIETTE.

I tell you that I am responsible for no fire.

GASTON.

Excuse me, Madame, my head burns, and yours the fault, the very great fault. You try in vain to deceive me ; I recognized you.

HENRIETTE.

Pardon, sir, did I take off my mask ?

GASTON.

No, but I am sure it was you. Who else has that wit, that gayety, that queenly grace ? And, moreover, the address given to the coachman, Rue de Varennes, No. 120, will you deny that it is your own ?

HENRIETTE.

Monsieur de Marsac, there is a limit to endurance, . . . a woman's endurance, especially. You drive me to my last defence. . . . Well then, I will now tell you the very truth.

GASTON.

Ah ! at last.

HENRIETTE.

Don't be too happy beforehand. This avowal I

have certainly wished to spare you, and to this end I invented the providential appearance of *my* aunt. Of two evils one should choose the lesser, but your wonderful persistency obliges me to speak. If I humble you, if I wound you, lay the fault upon yourself.

GASTON.

Goodness gracious ! what then is it ?

HENRIETTE.

It is this : a person in my house, taking advantage of my confidence in her and my sleep, had the impudence to put on my domino and to go in my place to the ball, of which you were the chief ornament.

GASTON.

A person of your household.

HENRIETTE.

My maid, poor Monsieur de Marsac, and it is with this saucy girl you flirted a part of the night.

GASTON.

O, come, that 's impossible !

HENRIETTE.

Overcome with remorse for such rashness, she told me about her escapade while dressing me this morning ; and, you see, I have run here, leaving everything else.

GASTON.

You count too much upon my credulity, Madame ; a chamber-maid ! O no !

HENRIETTE.

Ah, Miss Justine is a clever girl; she reads all the new novels.

GASTON.

No, I won't believe it. . . .

HENRIETTE.

Do you understand now the address given to the coachman? For you more than for me it is important that such an adventure does not appear in the papers. The kiss of an old lady is all very well; but the kiss of a chamber-maid! You have nothing left but to try a bed-post and handkerchief, and have it called by the reporters a "melancholy case of attempted self-destruction."

GASTON.

But who will tell me that I am not again the dupe of your inventions?

HENRIETTE.

Who? (*She turns towards the door on the left.*) René, for whom I am waiting, and who will give me an account of the little affair I have intrusted to him.

GASTON.

O, I should sink under the ridicule if I did not still have my doubts.

SCENE XIII.

THE SAME, RENÉ.

HENRIETTE.

Doubt no longer; here is Monsieur de Tavenay. Ah, René! What news?

RENÉ.

Dear Henriette, your orders are carried out; Miss Justine has done up her traps, and already left the house.

HENRIETTE.

René, please be so good as to tell Monsieur de Marsac the important reason I had for depriving myself of the services of this girl.

RENÉ.

I think Gaston will spare me a story which will be very disagreeable to him.

GASTON.

Eh? what? It is true then?

RENÉ.

What do you mean by true? Justine has had the cheek to give me to understand that the affection of such a man as yourself will entirely console her in her disgrace.

GASTON.

She has dared?

RENÉ.

I should not be surprised if she came after you, even here.

GASTON.

O, I like that!

HENRIETTE.

This girl is up to any folly.

GASTON.

By Jove, I don't know whether I am asleep or

awake. Am I in my right mind? How could I have been so deceived?

RENÉ.

It must have been very hot at the ball ; perhaps you left part of your wits at the bottom of the punch-bowl.

GASTON.

I? The only punch I had was that tossed down my back. What is to be done? (*He sits down on the sofa.*)

RENÉ.

Perhaps you 'd better hide yourself a few months. (*He takes his hand.*) Think too of Justine.

HENRIETTE.

In your place I should go to see how the Pacific Railroad is getting on. Think of Justine.

GASTON.

It is past imagination. It is unheard of. How the deuce was it? I was not dreaming. . . . I see it now ; I was seated on a sofa like this one. . . . A lady was there, close to me, charming me with her exquisite grace, her conversation pleasant and witty . . . (*LUCIE enters from the left, in black domino with pink bows and a mask.*) Suddenly she rose, and as I remained under the spell dreaming, and motionless, I felt on my brow a perfumed breath, and I heard a sweet voice whisper in my ear . . .

SCENE XIV.

THE SAME, LUCIE.

(LUCIE quietly approaches the sofa, leans towards GASTON, and kisses his forehead.) I love you, Gaston. (GASTON makes a sudden movement. LUCIE takes off her mask.)

LUCIE.

You will pay me for this, Monsieur de Marsac !

GASTON.

Stupid that I am ! it was my wife. (To HENRIETTE.) Ah, Madame, you are well revenged.

HENRIETTE.

Dear sir, one never has enough vengeance.

RENÉ.

Gaston, I was there, I heard all.

LUCIE.

I too.

RENÉ.

Do you know, I am greatly tempted to punch one of your eyes.

GASTON.

One is not enough, I deserve it for both. Strike.

LUCIE.

I must ask pardon for the great offender.

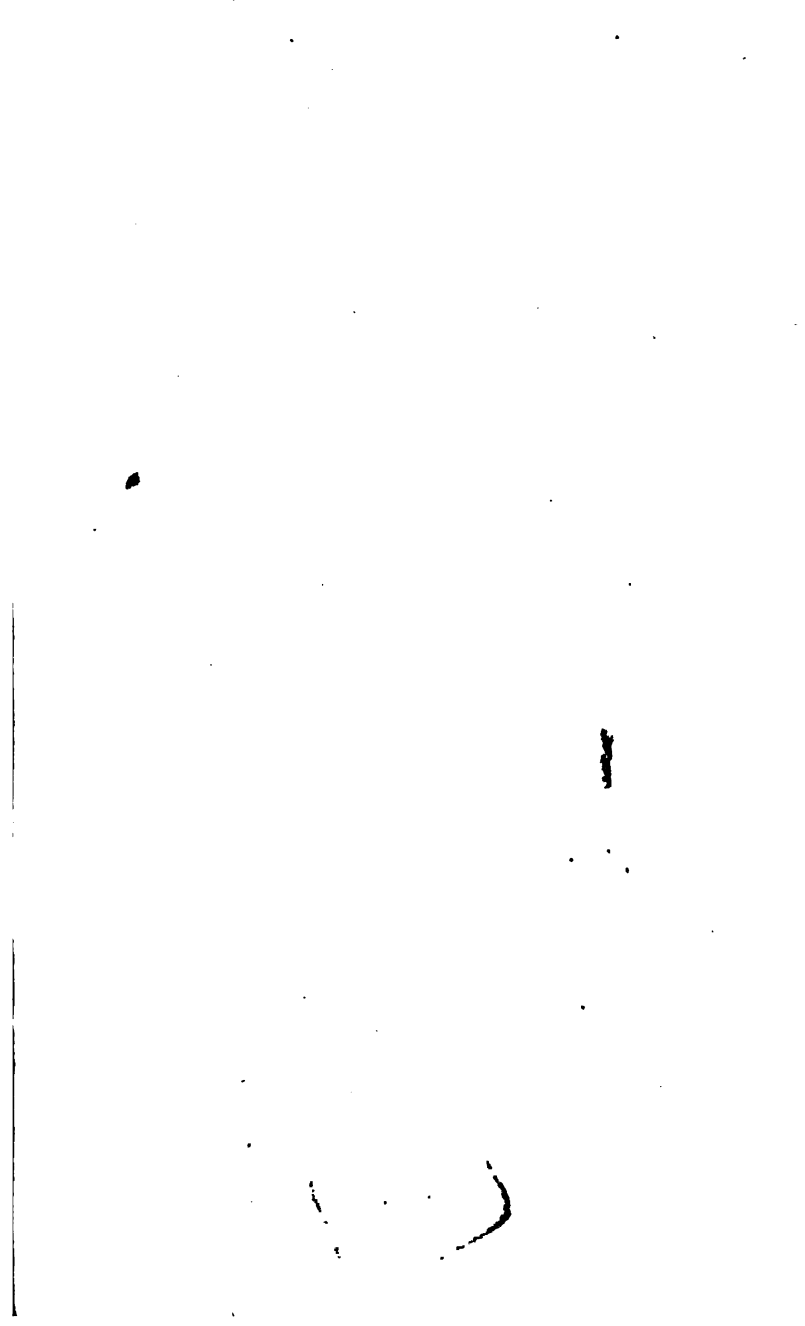
GASTON.

You are right, my dear Lucie, the lesson will be good for me.

LUCIE.

Yes, until you are again tempted by a "MYSTERIOUS KISS."

THE END.



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